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THE DIMITY SWEETHEART

ATHOL ESTES PORTER—*"The Dimity Sweetheart"*

"Athol always wore dimity, because I could not afford better," Will Porter is quoted as saying.

He dressed many of his heroines in dimity in remembrance.

The Dimity Sweetheart

O. Henry's Own Love Story

BY

Frances Goggin Maltby

Limited Edition

RICHMOND, VA.
Press of The Dietz Printing Co.
1930

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RICHMOND, VA.

Printed in the United States of America.

I desire to acknowledge my indebtedness to the late Mrs. Forney Beaumont Lacey and Mrs. Lillie Carver Haynie, who reviewed with me the incidents of our school days, and recalled memories all but forgotten. Also, I would express my appreciation of the help given me by Mr. L. K. Smoot of the State Library at Austin. But above all do I acknowledge my indebtedness to Mrs. G. P. Roach, the mother of Athol Estes Porter, for her cooperation and assistance.

F. G. M.

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I.

HEN William Sidney Porter (O. Henry) was six years old doing "sums" with one hand and drawing comic sketches with the other, turning his Aunt Lina's school-room in Greensboro into a house of mirth, there was born some four hundred miles west of Greensboro, in the town of Clarksville, Tennessee, a little girl who was to play a vital part in the drama of his life. Her name was Athol Estes.

The town of Clarksville in the year 1868 was a hotbed of unrest. It was in the grip of reconstruction. That dark period that followed the termination of the War Between the States was intensified in this section of the South. Murmurs of negro uprisings were everywhere to be heard. So numerous were the negroes in Clarksville at this time that it was sometimes referred to as "Little Haiti." It was at this period and in this environment that Athol Estes was born in April, the month of sunshine and showers; so typical of her life.

Mrs. Estes was convalescing after Athol's birth when she was informed by a faithful negro servant of plans for a general uprising among the negroes of Clarksville.

The danger was imminent. Mr. Estes was ill and had been ill for some months with tuberculosis. The Estes home was a short distance out of town. The family would have no police protection. Night was at hand. With an invalid husband and an infant, herself weak and unstrung, Mrs. Estes had no one to turn to except the faithful colored girl who had brought the awesome news. Together they discussed what had best be done. Finally, they decided to call in a colored boy who lived on the place and who they believed would be faithful. He was brought in to the family council and it was decided to send this boy into Clarksville with a note to the authorities, warning them of the negro uprising planned for that night.

The anxious hours that followed remained in Mrs. Estes' memory always. The suspense, the horror, was a vivid recollection. Would the boy prove faithful to them, or would he not? Should he fall in with the insurrectionists and inform them that the Estes family were notifying the police of their plans, what then? That night of anxious fears, of listening and waiting and watching dragged slowly to an end.

The boy proved faithful! He had delivered the note to the authorities and an uprising was prevented through the arrest of the ring-leaders. However, in the morning the Estes family left the farm never to return. Father, mother and Athol went into Clarksville until

ATHOL ESTES PORTER

Fashion Note in *Austin Statesman* June, 1893—"A marked feature of the modes this season is an abundance of decoration about the neck."

arrangements could be made to move to Nashville, a safer environment, where they would be among relatives. There, six months later, Mr. Estes died.

Athol spent her childhood in that reconstruction land where the Mother of Sorrows wept for a Lost Cause. But no reconstruction blight cast a shadow on her nature. The sunny curls that fell about her shoulders were scarcely brighter than her smile, a smile that was ever ready and that rippled her lips and radiated bewitchment from her eyes. Her complexion was that peach-bloom pink and white which we see too often in those of tubercular tendencies. She was always bubbling with animation and walked with the quick step of one aglow with health and vigor.

When Athol was six years old Mrs. Estes married again. Her second husband was a Mr. G. P. Roach of Nashville, formerly of Pittsburg. He had two daughters several years older than Athol. Mr. Roach was, when they became engaged, a man of considerable means. However, shortly before he was to be married to the young widow, he met with financial reverses. He offered to release Mrs. Estes from her engagement, but the bride-elect would not hear of it. They would go West together and start anew. There was something left. It would be enough if wisely invested. The "Go West Young Man" of Mr. Greely's was a popular slogan at the time.

Leaving his bride and young family in Nashville, Mr. Roach, with a relative of Horace Greely's who was taking his illustrious kinsman's advice, went to Texas. A very popular move to make at that period of our national history. That violet crowned city, Austin, on the picturesque Colorado River, won his admiration. Mr. Roach made some investments in Austin and bought a farm near Hornsby's Bend, a rural community near Austin with many historic and romantic associations. It may not be out of place to say here that Hornsby's Bend is named for Rogers Hornsby's family who have held vast tracts of land in that section since early pioneer days. No one, of course, will ask "Who is Rogers Hornsby?" We Americans know our baseball heroes if we do not always know our presidents.

It was in 1879 that Mr. Roach moved his family to Austin. Summers were spent on the farm at Hornsby's Bend. It may be that Athol played with Rogers' father. It is possible that he was among those who watched her curls bob as she soared in the swing that hung between two oaks in the garden. But this is a fact story, not fiction. We'll not digress.

Nettie and Effie, Mr. Roach's daughters, were devoted to their little stepsister with her shining curls and bright, winning smile. Having these older sisters who seemed always pleased to have Athol accompany them, the child matured much earlier, and was permitted to

go out much younger than was the usual custom among girls of our day.

When the public schools of Austin opened in 1881 Athol was enrolled. The child had been attending a private school, but a depleted exchequer made it necessary to send her to the "free school," as it was then called. Mrs. Roach was loath to do this, having the predjudice of the period against public schools, but she soon found that there were many of the well bred among Athol's friends and associates. Athol, having an unusually bright mind, ranked among the first in her class. When the Peabody medal was offered in the grammar school for the best record in English composition, Athol declared her intention to try for it. As she had always been frail of body, her mother discouraged the idea. However, Athol's naturally quick mind and keen ambition could not be withheld. Greatly to her delight, the Peabody medal was awarded her. The splendor of it, pinned to her dainty, long-sleeved dimity apron, is a vivid memory to the author. Seldom do we see scholarship and belleship so closely allied. Her desk fairly bristled with heart-offerings. There were glass marbles with vivid interiors—the most treasured possession of the adolescent youth—candy hearts with impassioned verses, flowers and fruit of varying colors and conditions. Athol was a belle from babyhood to maturity by sheer right of charm.

Curiously enough, it was just at this period of Athol's career that the Knight who was destined to woo and win her came to Texas. Perhaps the old song:

"There is a heart which heaven has made for thee—
Go forth and find, go forth and find!"

is exemplified in O. Henry's case. Be that as it may, the drugstore in which he worked in Greensboro had grown distasteful to the youth, William Sidney Porter. Texas, the great Land of Opportunity, seemed to draw him irresistibly. He never tired of hearing his friends, the Halls, who had a ranch in La Salle County, tell of the glories of the West, where men could ride boldly and think broadly. So young Porter broke away from the monotony of the drug store in Greensboro, and "ran wild on the prairies" for a couple of years. His "ship of adventure," as O. Henry expressed it, carried him into a land carefree and romantic, and this young dreamer of dreams from North Carolina regained his health and improved his mind.

O. Henry had left school at fifteen, but his teacher-aunt, "Miss Lina"—had given the boy the best foundation for a cultivated and erudite mind. "Miss Lina" was of the old school that held fast to the classics. From earliest childhood O. Henry had been an omnivorous reader. At fifteen he knew his mythology, his Shakespeare and his Bible, far better than the average college

graduate of today. One of the great interests of O. Henry's schooldays had been the study of orthography and derivation of words. When he left the drug store in Greensboro, where he had spent five years, he carried with him to La Salle County a dictionary which he mastered from cover to cover. In this way he acquired a marvelous vocabulary that was to serve him in good stead in after years. This knowledge, combined with his love and study of diversified expression, was the foundation of his epigrammatic writings. His mastery of words and their shades of meaning was acquired largely in that schoolless period while rustling cattle on the ranch in Texas. By no means all of O. Henry's time was spent wearing spurs and sombrero, astride a mustang on the ranch in La Salle County. We have a vivid picture of him in a hammock beneath the dense shade of an umbrella china tree, twanging a guitar as he sang and dreamed. After two years of ranch life O. Henry began to grow restless. The songs made him sentimental. He craved the association of young people of his age once more. He had friends in Austin, the capital of Texas. The Harrells of Austin were Greensboro people. They had known his father and mother in the early days. Then, too, his friends, the Halls, went frequently to Austin. They had interests there. And so, shortly, we find O. Henry in Austin visiting his friends, the Harrells. There were three Harrell

boys near his age for whom he formed a strong attachment. With the true hospitality of the old South, Mrs. Harrell made this young man from her home town welcome and entertained him for a year in her gracious fashion, mothering him as though he were a son, while he looked about for some congenial work. He was introduced to the friends of Harvey, Dave and Joe Harrell, and was soon sitting on the doorsteps frequented by the young people, twanging his much loved guitar and singing, "In the Evening by the Moonlight," and other popular favorites of the period.

Shortly we find the military spirit, fostered in his childhood when digging for relics in the old battlefield of Guilford's Courthouse, finding expression. He joined the "Austin Grays," a militia company of local prominence and fashion, donned the uniform, whenever uniforms were in order, and waxed his moustache. The waxed moustache was very impressive. It seemed a far cry from the sombrero hat, cowboy boots and spurs, so recently worn. These he left in La Salle County but he brought with him his dictionary, his guitar, his bass voice that he delighted to use, and his inimitable sense of humor, equipment that made him welcome wherever young people gathered to make merry. He became one of the "Hill City Quartette," composed of Messrs. Long, Hillyer, Edmonds and Porter, all society favorites, who soon were famous for

their ability to generate heart-throbs with, "Wait 'Till the Clouds Roll By, Jennie," "Genevieve," "In the Evening by the Moonlight," and many other contemporary favorites.

He organized the famous (some claimed infamous) "Jolly Entertainers," an organization whose mission was principally to serenade the fair sex. This courtesy was not always appreciated by the fathers of families whose ears were not attuned to the music of this orchestra, composed of two "fiddles," a guitar (the one brought in from the ranch) a triangle and a melodeon. The melodeon was carted about in an old surrey, while the "orchestral artists," as O. Henry called them, found transportation on the horse's back, in the surrey, or wherever the whim of the moment seemed to suggest. Among the young ladies favored with serenades by "The Jolly Entertainers," were the Roach girls, Nettie and Effie. Among the irate fathers was Mr. Roach. But we will come to that incident later in our story.

We must return to Athol Estes, still dressed in the long-sleeved dimity aprons, which we all wore in those days, even when we reached the dignity of high school. She spent each summer at Hornsby's Bend with the horses and cows, the chickens and cats, the dogs and the birds. It was a Mecca of delight. The years were uneventful until high school days arrived. Athol was still wearing the Peabody Medal pinned to her dimity

apron to which had been added a medal awarded her for music. We were as proud of Athol's medals as she could possibly have been herself.

During our senior year in high school Athol was my deskmate. We had deskmates in those days. My knowledge of her and her affairs was very intimate and personal, so for the rest of my story I shall drop the editorial "we" and use the personal "I".

I recall how charming and attractive I thought Athol Estes, with her winning smile and bobbing curls. I was delighted when she was assigned as my deskmate. I was taller than Athol and her head just fitted the curve of my arm. I can never forget the feel of her curly head against my shoulder as we studied from the same book, exchanging whispered confidences the while. It was during the session of 1886-1887 that I began to hear so much about Will Porter. Every day she would report having seen him either in the afternoon or the evening of the previous day. Often she would whisper, "Howard and Dick and Will Porter were around last night and we sat on the steps and sang." Athol and I were walking down the avenue one afternoon, just after they had had one of these doorstep concerts, when Will Porter joined us. Athol spoke with enthusiasm of their nocturnal vocal efforts. Will Porter turned to me and with characteristic dry humor, remarked: "The neighbors who survived are still living."

Barton Springs—A picturesque and romantic spot beloved of O. Henry.

II.

IT is not recorded when Will Porter first met Athol Estes, his "Dimity Sweetheart," as he called her. Dimity was a thin cotton material very much worn at this time, and the crispness of Athol's dimities, always freshly pressed, is a vivid memory. It is very likely that he first saw Athol at the laying of the corner-stone of the magnificient capitol of Texas at Austin in 1885, said to be at one time the seventh largest building in the world. Or if not that day, certainly that night.

There was a "german" that night given by the Austin Grays, the militia company to which Will Porter belonged. Mrs. Roach, Athol's mother, has a very vivid recollection of that day and that evening. Athol had a new dimity with many ruffles. She wanted to wear it to the laying of the corner-stone. It was her only new dress, so Mrs. Roach advised against it. However, daughter's wishes prevailed over a mother's wisdom, and Athol wore the new dimity. She had been chosen by our class to place in the corner-stone the souvenirs donated by our class. One of these was a long yellow curl clipped from Athol's lovely head. Of course, she

wanted to wear the new dimity. A sudden shower came up, as showers have an unpleasant way of doing on great occasions, and drenched the new dress—it was spoiled.

A bedraggled and discouraged Athol returned home that afternoon under the umbrella of an admirer. The dimity appeared a total loss. She wanted to go to the german that night. What should she do? She had intended wearing this same dress. Sixteen was simply garbed in those days and there was usually but one "best frock." Now, the dance was out of the question. But Athol was a resourceful young person. She laundered the new dimity herself, took it next door to an old colored mammy, versed in the art of using fluting irons and Cinderella was a princess again.

Athol was beautiful that night. If Will Porter did not fall in love with her then he must surely have been attracted for she was characteristically dressed, charming, and the "belle of the ball."

Long years after a friend asked O. Henry: "Will, why is it that you always dress your heroines in dimity or crêpe de chene?" He replied, "That is all I know about women's clothes. Athol always wore dimity. We couldn't afford anything better. It always looked good to me. And my second wife wore crêpe de chene."

It is the most natural thing in the history of youth that Will Porter should have fallen in love with Athol

Estes. Their natures touched at many points, and yet were divergent to give that variety essential to happiness. They were both passionately fond of music, both had good voices that blended when they sang together.

The drolleries of life gave each keen enjoyment, and their sympathies were always alive to suffering and want. Will Porter describes one of his heroines thus: "She was gay hearted and full of tender, whimsical fancies." He might have been speaking of Athol. He might have substituted "he" and described himself!

During the winters of 1886 and 1887 the society columns of the *Austin Statesman* record numerous "germans" and social gatherings at which we find the names of Athol Estes and Will Porter listed. Will and Athol also sang together in the choir of the Southern Presbyterian Church, "Dr. Smoot's church," as it was called.

Athol Estes had another ardent admirer of whom I heard much, an Apollo by the name of Zimplemann. She wore a lock bracelet the key of which was carried by Lee Zimplemann. Lee gave her, also, a beautiful opal ring. I used to view this ring sentimentally and sadly, for I had heard the superstition that opals are unlucky in love. It was certainly borne out in the case of Athol and Lee. Little wonder we read in the *Austin Statesman* of that date that Lee Zimpleman sang at a local concert "When Other Lips and Other Hearts," and "A Heart Bowed Down," with telling effect.

Athol's romances were of deep interest to me. I had no romance of my own, so I fairly fed upon the heart interests she furnished. I was some two years younger than Athol, tall, lank, curlless and freckled. I solaced myself with the thought that even had I been the charmer that Athol was I should not have been allowed to do the things that Athol did. My mother was of the old school and held the belief that books and boys could not combine, that "beaux in your head" excluded study. So I dug away at our algebra problems while Athol carrolled in the moonlight with Lee or Will. I used to trade her those problems for bits of English composition composed by her admirer, Will Porter.

I have often thought that we were, no doubt, the first copyists of O. Henry, but not the last by many thousands. I recall some delightful bits that came into my possession in this way. One of these fragments, written with characteristic absurdity, I have preserved. Our English assignment had been a description of an entertainment given for the benefit of a local church. I can now fully appreciate O. Henry's enjoyment in passing this on to us to be used as a school-girl composition. It ran—"The tableaux were all on a large scale, intricate, elaborate, and very elegant. Colored lights were burned, and the young ladies in their groupings and graceful draperies were very beautiful." One can fairly feel O. Henry's enjoyment in writing this.

Athol used to bring other things of O. Henry's creation besides these gems of English composition to gladden our desk. Her books were filled with cartoons of his drawing. "Funny pictures," Athol would call them. Will Porter used to tease Athol about our bashful and unmarried young high school principal. During our senior years the condition of our young professor's affections were discovered to be centered, not on any of the belles of the class, but on a quiet, modest, young student, "Miss Richmond." The belles were supposed to be appropriately chagrined. Will Porter drew this cartoon in which the "Leads" were easily recognized. Its caption was:

"Richmond Wins in Target Practice"

It depicted the senior class lined up and armed with bows and arrows. The professor was shown with back against a wall, discreetly near a window. In front of him was a huge pile of books arranged as breastworks. He was confused and shrinking. One long leg was groping for the window. The leader of the firing squad was Athol, her curls caught high on her head, many scalps dangling from her belt. She was aiming carefully at the part of the professor's anatomy where his heart was supposed to be. The other excited young women in line were doing the same thing. All save one. At the far end was a serious-eyed, cautious young

woman who was taking careful aim at the Professor's boot. She seemed to know instinctively where to locate the bashful professor's heart.

Another cartoon that occasioned a good deal of merriment I recall very vividly was drawn by O. Henry in memory of one occasion when the "Jolly Entertainers" gave an "orchestral serenade" at the Roach home. Mr. Roach was the most indulgent of fathers, but the "heart appeals" generated by the "Jolly Entertainers" did not affect him in the intended way. The Roach home was represented as a storm center. Chairs and tables were overturned. Mr. Roach, clad in night apparel, was breaking away from Mrs. Roach, pistol in one hand and candle in the other, while Mrs. Roach clung to him and plead with him to "spare the artists." The two Roach girls and Athol were shown hanging out of a window in rapt unconsciousness of their irate father. A second view depicted the hasty retreat of the "Jolly Entertainers," as a pistol was fired from an upper window. Two of the artists were astride the steed and two on top of the surrey, casting a guitar and triangle at the speeding horse. Inside the surrey the violin and guitar "artists" continued to perform. The instruments were giving out prolonged brays, "as cool as Nero." Beneath this sketch was written—*"The Only Time the Jolly Entertainers Ever Declined an Invitation to Stop."* I had these two O. Henry cartoons for years in

one of my school books. What treasures they would be today if I still had them!

These were only two of the many cartoons drawn by O. Henry that Athol brought to school. He filled her books with them. Drawing was one of the gifts which Athol Estes and Will Porter had in common. Athol's drawings ran to little boys with patched trousers and little girls with sunbonnets and aprons. Sunbonnets were much worn in our school days. The pink bonnets with many ruffles were the acme of charm. These, as well as the aprons universally worn by the school-girl of the day, were generally made of dimity. Little wonder O. Henry usually dressed his heroines in dimity. It was certainly closely associated with his school-girl sweetheart. I recall a blue dimity ruffled bonnet that Athol wore just the color of her eyes. With the fresh, crisp strings tied under her chin and the bonnet tilted back on her curls she was adorable.

At that date—1887—Austin was building a new high school so we were temporarily housed in the basement of the old Baptist church. The Baptist church was directly across from the Governor's Mansion, a beautiful building of Colonial architecture built in 1855 during the administration of Governor Pease. Back of the church and across from the shady grounds of the Mansion was a rock pile intended for use in some improvements on the church. It was on this rock pile that we

used to gather at the noon hour and swap biscuits and jam, pickles and heart experiences, impartially. Governor Ireland held the reins of government at that time. He was extremely fond of young people and he never passed the group on the rock pile, as he went home for lunch, without stopping for a chat. He formed the habit of making contributions to our lunches. When he came toward us, paper sack in hand, we knew it meant peanuts, pop-corn, or candy. He used to urge us to come over in the shady grounds of the Mansion to eat. However, realizing that this would be an imposition and with a wisdom that did us credit, we declined. Athol, with a readiness of tongue that was characteristic, declared: "All shade and no rock pile is bad for the young." At that time we little dreamed how much need she would have for this quaint philosophy. On another occasion when the Governor had delivered his invitation and his sack of peanuts, she said to him: "O, but then we would be out of sight, and don't want to be out of mind!"

That remark was supposed, of course, to apply to the Governor, but in the light of after events I think my friend Athol had in mind another individual who frequently stopped at the rock pile to chat. One William Sidney Porter was visiting at the time at the Harrell's whose home was a block beyond the Mansion. He brought no offerings as did the Governor, nor did he

The General Land Office, Austin, Texas, that "medieval castle," where Will Porter worked four years—the scene of several of his best stories.

stop to chat so often, but he always cast a glance and some cryptic remark at the occupants of the rock pile, then moved on up the hill with military dignity, for Will Porter was now Lieutenant Porter of the Austin Grays. As he continued up the hill with his dignity and his waxed moustache there would be murmurs of: "Isn't he adorable?"

From the *Austin Statesman* of Sunday, June 5th, 1887, I take the following:

"WAITER DRILL

Last night at Turner Hall the Southern Presbyterian church gave the entertainment that the rain broke up on Friday night. The Waiter Drill of the young ladies was very good. They executed the manual of arms very nicely, and the marching was excellent. The officers were as follows:

Captain—W. S. PORTER
First Lieutenant—MISS LAURA DRISCOLL
Second Lieutenant—MISS MAGGIE HOWARD
First Sergeant—MISS ATHOL ESTES
Second Sergeant—MISS ELLEN BORROUGHS."

Old Turner Hall at that date was a favorite place for entertainments and dances. The grounds were romantic with many sequestered seats, vine screened and rose scented. It had at one time been a German beer garden, and was lighted by oil-burning lamps that flickered dimly. Just enough light for the proprieties and yet not too much for the lovers. It is said that it was during the rehearsals for the "Waiter Drill" that Athol

Estes promised definitely to remove the lock bracelet from her arm, the opal ring from her finger, and return them to the donor. She promised to be firm in this. I, myself, heard her tell Will Porter, "I'm going to be firm, firm as a rock!"

With rare wisdom Will Porter recognized his advantage and strategic position. The uniform gave him courage. He realized its influence, so he pressed his suit with vigor and success. He not only won Athol but decided to storm the strong citadel of home. Mrs. Roach was not under the spell of the uniform. She had favored and still did favor young Zimplemann. She could not adjust herself to this change in the state of Athol's affections. She told Will Porter that she feared Athol did not know her own mind. Her advice was that they wait and see if there was no change of heart on either side. Athol was young and impulsive and not very strong and her plans were to have her make a visit in Nashville during the summer.

Will Porter was desperately in love. He persisted and urged that there was too much risk in letting Athol go to Nashville. Mrs. Roach was obdurate. She told him that Athol's father had died of tuberculosis as his mother had done. Under these circumstances she could never give her consent to their marriage. Always of a sensitive nature, Will Porter retired from this interview discomfited, hurt, but none the less determined.

He would take no chance on that visit to Nashville. The lock bracelet, still on Athol's arm, because "Lee just wouldn't bring the key and take it off," gave him enough anxiety. He came no more to the Roach home to sit on the steps and sing "In the Evening by the Moonlight," but he haunted familiar walks and bypaths where he was likely to meet Athol, and continued his suit.

During the early part of June, notwithstanding the diversion of the Waiter Drill and Athol's love affair, we were all principally interested in the commencement exercises that were to be held on the tenth, and the essays and orations with which we were to harrow a long suffering audience. "Long suffering" is aptly descriptive, for there were fourteen of us in the class and there were to be fourteen essays and orations! The essays were feminine; the orations were masculine. It would not have been thought fit for a woman to have delivered an oration in that day and time. We were bristling with importance. We sought through *The World's Best Literature* for subjects for our pens. Athol chose "Three Fold is the Pace of Time." An amused Will Porter privately illustrated it: "Walk, Trot, and Canter," with recognizable cartoons of Athol performing these gaits. This essay of Athol's, which was delivered on the night of June 10th, 1887, was very O. Henryesque. However, it ended with a quotation that O. Henry may have remembered in after years as a

direct message from his school-girl wife: *"Look not back upon the past, it comes not again, improve the present, it is thine, and go forward to meet the shadowy future without fear and with a manly heart."*

While speaking of essays I would mention the fact in passing that the subject of Will Porter's mother's essay was a singular foreshadowing—*"The Influence of Misfortune on the Gifted."*

It may divert some progressive young educator of today to see how thoroughly we did it "when mother was a girl." I take this program from the *Austin Statesman* of Friday, June 10th, 1887.

Invocation—Rev. Dr. Howard.
Salutory—*"Simon Says Thumbs Up"*—Miss Hearshfeld.
Essay—*"The Hand of Fate is on the Curtain"*—Miss Goggin (the author.)
Oration—*Character and Reputation*—Mr. Penick.
Music
Essay—*Little Things*—Miss Brunnet.
Essay—*"Trifles Make Perfection"*—Miss Wood.
Music
Oration—*Character of Charles I.*—Mr. Brady.
Essay—*"Three Fold is the Pace of Time"*—Miss Estes.
Essay—*"Sometime"*—Miss Richmond.
Music
Oration—*Michael Angelo*—Mr. Wooten.
Essay—*"Make Hay While the Sun Shines"*—Miss Robinson.
Music
Essay—*"Beyond the Alps Lies Italy"*—Miss Sutor.
Essay—*Woman's Influence*—Miss Carver.
Valedictory—Mr. McFall.

No doubt, had there been fourteen more graduates there would have been fourteen more orations and essays. Our preceptors believed in a strictly impartial distribution of favors. As I recall it, the audience "quit a-struggling" and sank to somnapathy after the "Pace of Time" got through exercising its three-fold function continuing in this state until "Woman's Influence" brought it to a dazed awakening, completed by Mr. McFall, whose superior lung power was reserved for just such an emergency.

The *Austin Statesman,* in describing the program, said: "Before the exercises closed, Miss Estes, on behalf of the graduating class, called Professor Bryant to task for his many delinquencies during the past session and presented him with an elegant combination gold pencil and toothpick. The professor said something as he backed out with his blushes, but the best fielder in the land could not have caught it on the fly."

Will Porter helped Athol select the "elegant combination gold pencil and toothpick" as our gift to our bashful young professor and I recall his keen enjoyment of the whole incident.

So ended Athol's school career. But those of us who were her companions from day to day, who were merry when she was merry and sad when she was sad, who recognized in her ready wit, her quick repartee, her whimsical humor and her loving heart, a companion of

rare congeniality, believe that she was no small factor in the making of our great O. Henry. That the best that was in him, the purity that he has given us in his delineation of character, was inspired by the "Dimity Sweetheart," beloved by her high school friends. She was impulsive, sweet, loyal. No wonder he wrote: "The scent of the flower, the booty of the bees, the primal drip of spring waters, the overture of the lark, the twist of the lemon peel on the cocktail of creation—such is the bride. Holy the wife, revered is the mother, gallíptious is the summer girl—but the bride is the certified check among the wedding presents that the gods send in when a man is married to mortality."

The following society note taken from the *Austin Statesman* of Friday, June 17, 1887, is of interest on account of what was soon to follow.

"Last evening the residence of Mr. C. E. Anderson was a scene of much merriment. The occasion was a german given to Miss Lizzie Thornton. The evening was spent by those present in the most enjoyable of dances, the german. Among those present were the following—Misses Walker, McCarthy, Brush, Perry, Boak, Estes, etc. Messrs Anderson, Goldman, Booth, Moore, Long, Porter, etc."

Will Porter at this time was boarding at the Anderson's who had become warm personal friends of his. They were also very fond of Athol and did everything they could to further the affair between them.

III.

TWO weeks passed. It was Friday, July 1st. Mrs. Jackson, who, as Pearl Cashell, was one of the crowd who swapped pickles and yarns on the rock pile back of the old Baptist Church, has written the following graphic bit concerning the Will Porter we knew back in 1887 and what happened on that July day when O. Henry's "Dimity Sweetheart" became his wife:

"I will sketch lightly the Will Porter of Austin who danced well, sang love songs soulfully accompanied by the tinkle of his well-loved guitar, and kept his friends entertained by his effervescing wit. Will Porter could work and work hard, but life and people and love meant too much to him to work unnecessarily." Further along in her article Mrs. Jackson gives this account of his marriage: "One late afternoon Mrs. Roach wanted Athol to go up town on an errand. In her madcap way, Athol had torn her petticoat and her mother, a typical woman of the old South, said: 'You certainly cannot go out of the yard in that torn skirt?' But Athol protested: 'You are in a hurry for the thread. I'll just pin it up. I won't see anybody.' That incident has

always convinced Mrs. Roach that Athol did not leave the house with any intention of marrying but that she met Will Porter purely by accident that afternoon. Her elopement was unpremeditated." Mrs. Jackson continues:

"Mr. and Mrs. Charles Anderson, warm personal friends of the young couple, went with them. They drove to the home of Dr. Smoot of the Southern Presbyterian Church, in whose choir they both sang. Here Athol Estes became the bride of Will Porter. The Smoots were sitting on the porch in the cool evening air at the end of a July day. The house behind them was dark. Dr. Smoot said: 'There comes a carriage.' A carriage after night was an event in that quiet neighborhood. The carriage stopped at the gate. Mr. Anderson came up the walk, made arrangements and the wedding party came in. Later Mr. Anderson acted as peacemaker between mother and daughter, and the romance ended as all romances should, with: 'God bless you, my children.' In the stormy days of Will Porter's trouble he had no more staunch and loyal friend than his mother-in-law, Mrs. Roach."

The following is taken from the *Austin Statesman* of Saturday, July 2nd, 1887:

"Hearts United

It will be a matter of surprise and pleasure as well, for friends to know that last evening Mr. Will S. Porter and Miss Athol Estes

The residence of Dr. Smoot, where Athol Estes and Will Porter were married "at the end of a July day" in 1887.

were joined in the holy bonds of matrimony. The solemn and impressive ceremony was performed by the Rev. Dr. Smoot at his residence at 9:30 o'clock last evening in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, the Rev. Mr. Murrey, and Mrs. Smoot. The young couple immediately after the ceremony repaired to the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Anderson where they will make their home for the present. Both Mr. Porter and his charming young bride have numerous friends in the city who will join in extending to them most cordial congratulations and good wishes for their future happiness and prosperity."

When last I saw Mrs. Roach she gave me a graphic account of her hours of anxious waiting when Athol did not return on that July afternoon. It was before the days of universal telephones. Also, it was before the days when adults were kidnapped in broad daylight. She sat at home and waited for Athol to return, believing she had thoughtlessly stopped for a visit with some of the girls and had stayed for supper. The evening meal was supper, not dinner, in those days. As hours of waiting passed, her worry increased. It was nearly ten when she saw "a lit hack" as she called it, turn down their street. It drove up to the door and stopped. She knew at once that something momentous had happened. Trembling with apprehension, she went to meet the man who emerged from the carriage and was coming toward her. It was Mr. Anderson. She knew at once that he brought news of Athol. Was she hurt? Was she dead? In the few seconds of waiting she suffered hours of alarm.

And then he told her that Athol was married to Will Porter. Her first reaction was one of relief. Then it gave way to indignation. It took Mr. Anderson some time to make her see that it was her duty to receive the young couple and give them her blessing.

Athol told her mother that she had married Will Porter because she loved him and could not resist his appeal. That there was nothing premeditated or planned in their elopement. It is said she still wore the lock bracelet on her arm, her former sweetheart having refused to surrender the key. Mrs. Roach remembered the torn petticoat pinned up with a safety, and was convinced. Knowing Athol, her daintiness, her exceptional trimness, the thought that she had gone to meet Will Porter with the intention of eloping was unbelievable.

In all the accounts of the marriage of Athol Estes and Will Porter I have read, the date is given as Tuesday, July 5th. This is a mistake. It was Friday, July 1st. The files of the *Austin Statesman* in the State Library at Austin verify this. Also, a noted biographer tells us that it was a "borrowed carriage" and the hour was "midnight." Possibly, a little more romantic, but such was not the case. Athol's mother, the *Austin Statesman,* and Dr. Smoot's son, who was sitting on the porch that July night when the "hack" drove up, are my authorities. The night was young, the hour was seemly, and the carriage had been rented from Miller, the liveryman.

I discredit the thought that a little Southern girl, steeped in the traditions and superstitions of the old black mammy would have *chosen* Friday for her wedding day. In 1887 we were still very much under the shadow of those superstitutions. No one was ever married on Friday. It was tempting Providence. Knowing Athol, I am sure that she did not select Friday. There was no planning, no arranging. She was swept along by the great love that had entered her soul.

In describing a young bride in *Sisters of the Golden Circle* O. Henry has given us that graphic bit in which I see Athol quite plainly:

"But I beg of you to observe Mrs. James Williams—Hattie Chalmers that was—once the belle of Cloverdale. Pale blue is the bride's if she will; and this color she had honored. Willingly had the moss-rosebud loaned to her cheek of its pink—and as for the violet—her eyes will do very well as they are, thank you. . .

"And on Mrs. James Williams' face was recorded a little library of the world's best thought in three volumes. Volume No. 1 contained the belief that James Williams was about the right sort of thing. Volume No. 2 was an essay on the world declaring it to be a very excellent place. Volume No. 3 disclosing the belief that in occupying the highest seat in the Rubberneck auto they were traveling the pace that passeth all understanding."

Substitute a "lit hack" for a Rubberneck auto and Mrs. William Sidney Porter for Mrs. James Williams and we have our little bride of that summer night in 1887—

"But I beg of you observe Mrs. Will Porter—Athol Estes that was—once the belle of Austin. Pale blue is the bride's if she will; and this color she had honored. Willingly had the moss-rosebud loaned to her cheek of its pink—and as for the violet—her eyes do very well as they are, thank you. . . .

"And on Mrs. Porter's face was recorded a little library of the world's best thought in three volumes. Volume No. 1 contained the belief that Will Porter was about the right sort of thing. Volume No. 2 was an essay on the world declaring it to be a very excellent place. Volume No. 3 disclosed the belief that in occupying a seat beside Will Porter in a lit hack in company with the Charles Andersons that they were traveling at a pace that passeth all understanding."

To Volume No. 1 Athol Estes Porter clung with faith, love and loyalty throughout the vicissitudes of the ten years of her married life and clasped it to her bosom with a sigh of perfect confidence and immortal trust when she died. "Greater love hath no man than this."

Mr. Smith in his comprehensive biography of O. Henry quotes the following from O. Henry's pen as a reminiscent bit: "Dear, kind fairy, please cut out the order for money and a forty horse-power touring car and fame and a new growth of hair and the presidency of the boat club. Instead of any of them turn backward—oh, turn backward and give us just a teeny-weeny bit of our wedding trip over again. Just an hour, dear fairy, so that we can remember how the grass and the poplar trees looked, and the bow of those bonnet strings tied beneath her chin—even if it was the hatpin

that did the work. Can't do it? Very well; hurry up with the touring car and the oil stock then."

Will Porter has given us many glimpses of his young wife, of whom he was extremely proud. His Bride—"word of word in the epiphany of life and love." She held herself proudly as they drove out to Dr. Smoot's "at the end of a July day." She had promised him that she would be firm, "firm as a rock." "But rocks have sinking spells," he reminded her. There were no "sinking spells." She was courageous. They even exchanged a few timid jests as they rolled along the road toward the poplars and the grass and—and—O well, to those who have been on a wedding journey, even if it is only a short drive in a "lit hack," why repeat? As for the others? Take a wedding journey of your own.

IV.

ATHOL and Will Porter spent six months at the Anderson's. At the end of that time they began housekeeping in a small cottage on Eleventh Street. It was only a few blocks from the land office where Will Porter held a position as draughtsman. His friend, Mr. Hall, the ranchman from La Salle County, was then Land Commissioner, and during his tenure of office Will Porter laid away his store of information concerning the romantic legends and facts encompassing the early history of many land deals recorded in that historic office. Will Porter was a great favorite among the men employed in the office at that time for his humor was effervescent and he radiated happiness. I have heard many stories told by his co-workers of the cartoons that he drew and the jokes that he played.

The cottage on Eleventh Street was very small, but it suited the needs and desires of Athol and Will Porter. Many years later, in writing of the limited quarters of a young couple, he says: "If a home is happy it cannot fit too close—let the dresser collapse and become a billiard table; let the mantle turn to a rowing machine,

the escritoire to a spare bedroom, the washstand to an upright piano; let the four walls come together, if you will, so you and your Delia are between. But if your home is the other kind, let it be wide and long—enter you at the Golden Gate, hang your hat on Hatteras, your cape on Cape Horn and go out at Labrador."

This first home being small was an asset to their happiness. I recall their pride in this wee cottage that had been built for another bride. There was a nice little porch on which to sit in the cool of the evening. Notwithstanding the house was perched on a limestone ledge of rock, there were pomegranates and althæas blooming in the yard. I recall quoting Athol's words to Will Porter, "All shade and no rock pile is bad for the young." He laughed and said that she was a game little philosopher. That her altruism would be her ruin. They showed me with hilarious pride the new bedroom suite purchased "on the instalment plan." It was a splendid affair and I was duly impressed with the mirrors in both dresser and wardrobe. "So Will and myself can dress simultaneously and harmoniously," explained Athol.

The principal interest in those early days of their married life was their home. Their diversion was music. They both still sang in the choir of the Southern Presbyterian Church. Athol had an unusually sweet soprano and Will Porter sang bass, though some-

times he sang tenor. They loved to sing, and no musical production was complete without these two. They were both members of Musical Union, an organization that gave frequent entertainments. They always took part in these, and at rehearsals Athol would frequently take three or four parts as she read music readily and was always willing to "fill in." Will Porter was proud of her quickness and versatility and would look on with possessive pride.

I, as one of the supporting chorus, used to stand very close to Will Porter and his buzzing bass in my ear is a clear recollection. His dry comments and humorous observations created much merriment. Between solos, Athol would steal back to the rear line where we stood and exchange pithy repartee with her husband and admonish me to keep him in hand. Her pride in him was unbounded. She quoted him constantly, and his name was ever on her lips. In speaking of O. Henry a noted writer has said:

"It is certainly no accident that the year of his marriage was also the year in which he began to rely on his pen as a supplementary means of income." *(Smith's Biography).*

It was in these early months of their married life that Will Porter received his first check from *Truth.* What mattered that it was for six dollars only! He had sold a story to *Truth.* That was the main thing. Athol kissed him, congratulated him, and danced about him.

The little house "that could not fit too close" where the young couple first went housekeeping. In those days there were no weeds, but many flowers, and the pomgranates (seen to the right and left of the cottage) bloomed all summer.

It was a glorious promise of future success. It was a recognition that she was convinced he was due. She had always known it must come to him. Six dollars! Had six dollars ever looked so big or brought so much joy to a home? "It will keep the chafing dish bubbling and buy steak and onions," declared Will Porter. It also kept their spirits bubbling and Hope enthroned.

Mr. Smith says in his *Biography,* and there is nothing truer—

> "O Henry found in his married life not only happiness but an incentive to effort that he had sorely lacked. It was an incentive that sprang from perfect congenialty and from an ambition to make and have a home. Mrs. Porter was witty and musical. She was also stimulating and responsive to the drolleries of her husband. She co-operated with him in his sole journalistic venture, and helped him in his society items in the *Houston Post.* If the thought of her did not shape the character of *Della* in *The Gift of the Magi,* it might have done so."

I agree with Mr. Smith absolutely. Those who knew Athol best see her both as Della in *The Gift of the Magi,* and as Delia in *A Service of Love.* The character delineation is perfect. However, in Della we have a word-picture of Athol. In speaking of the beauty of Della's hair, he writes—"Had the Queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out of the window some day to dry just to depreciate her Majesty's jewels and gifts. . . It fell in rippling, shining cascades." Such was Athol's

crowning glory. Della, as you know, sacrificed her hair for the love she bore her husband, to make him a Christmas present, a fob-chain for his treasured watch. O. Henry gives us a charming picture of Della sitting on the table near the door, fob-chain in hand, shorn of her beautiful hair, waiting for Jim to come home. She is appalled at the thought that Jim may not think her pretty any more. "She had a habit of saying little silent prayers about the simplest everyday things," wrote O. Henry. "Please God make him think I am still beautiful," she prayed.

With the completion of my story you will see how very like Della, the altruist, O. Henry's Dimity Sweetheart was. In the trying days that were to come, no sacrifice was too great, no weariness of the flesh or the spirit too demanding, that Athol was not always ready with a smile and words of cheer for the man she loved. The habit of "little silent prayers" was always with her. And these prayers were all for the man she loved.

The first sorrow that came to Will Porter and his young wife was the death of their first born, a boy who was to have been named for his father. The little house with the new bedroom suite and pomegranates blooming in the yard, was a sad place for a time. They were too young to be mastered by sorrow and a day came when the birds sang for them again and they saw that flowers were still blooming. After a time they, them-

selves, sang quite in the old way. However, the passing of their first born had left its scar. Late afternoons they would borrow old Charley and the phaeton from Mr. Roach, drive out to the cemetery and put altheas and pomgranates on the little grave.

As was the case with her first born, Athol was very ill when Margaret was born. For weeks they feared for her life. She mended so slowly that the fear of the disease of which her father had died filled her loved ones with anxiety. She, too, was tortured with the thought that this shadow was coming into her life. She confided her belief to her mother. Mrs. Roach told Will Porter and persuaded him that the best place for his ill wife would be her mother's home where she could have constant care and attention. Athol and Will Porter were loath to leave the little house "that could not fit too close" where they had been so happy. But the move seemed necessary. Will Porter carried Athol in his arms to the phaeton behind old Charley. He placed little Margaret in her lap. "The Two Dromeos," their kittens, snuggled at her feet and they drove to the Roach home. The curtains of the little house on Eleventh Street where they had spent their first happy years, were drawn. They could not afford to keep the house just to hold the furniture, so they stored their possessions and handed in the key.

Athol, the baby, Will Porter and "The Two Dro-

meos" spent some months in the Roach home where Athol mended rapidly. As soon as was thought advisable, they rented a house next door and re-established the bedroom suite and stored furniture. When summer came and Margaret had developed into a robust charming baby, the paternal craving to exhibit the young miss to his kindred in Greensboro took possession of Will Porter. It was decided that a visit to his old home would be the best tonic in the world for Athol. She needed the change and his people would have the opportunity of beholding the most wonderful mother and baby in the world. Athol was keen to have Will Porter accompany them to witness the astonishment and admiration on the faces of his kindred on viewing his progeny, but his financial condition and the duties of the Land Office prevented. It was decided that Athol and Margaret should stay until October when he would join them and they would return to Austin together.

It is possible that the October that Will Porter spent in Greensboro with his wife and baby was one of the proudest and happiest periods of his life. He found Athol blooming and bright and apparently completely restored to health. Little Margaret was the center of an admiring group, learning words and phrases, and, as he expressed it, "as full of tricks as 'The Two Dromeoes'." I can picture Will Porter in his pride of possession, exhibiting his attractive and responsive wife

and his nonpareil baby to appreciative kindred and friends with that "they belong to me" expression, so familiar to those of us who had the privilege of his friendship.

The picture of Athol and Margaret accompanying these memoirs was taken at this time. He carried this photograph in his inside coat pocket for many years. But it is hardly fair to Athol to give her photograph to the public. Her beauty was chiefly that of coloring and expression. Her eyes were blue with a tenderness, a love in them that was soul-touched. Her complexion had the clearness and tint of a sea-shell and seemed kissed by eternal youth and bloom. Her hair, like Della's in *The Gift of the Magi,* was her crowning glory and fell in "rippling, shining cascades" when the hairpins let it fall. But her principal charm was her animation and tender sympathetic face that reflected a heart of gold.

In the spring of 1893 we saw the young couple and Margaret and "The Two Dromeoes" established across the street from the Roach home. This cottage was a bit larger than the house next door. There was an extra bedroom. Will Porter's aunt, "Miss Lina" as he always called her, had promised to visit them. It was something he had long hoped for, and long desired. Will Porter had loving and loyal recollections of this aunt who had mothered him, taught him, disciplined

his mind and body with no uncertain hand. He awaited an opportunity of showing his appreciation and love. In renting the new cottage they planned for this visit with pleasurable anticipation.

"Man proposes and God disposes.' Miss Lina never came. The new curtains for the spare bedroom and the new matting were bought in vain.

Athol, always industrious, neat and orderly, was inclined to overdo her strength. Will Porter, recognizing this fact and fearing a return of the ill health that had so alarmed him, helped about the home in every way he could. In his ranch experience he had learned camp cooking and was proud of his accomplishment. Sometimes when Athol's friends dropped in Will Porter would suggest that he be allowed to cook a meal. He prided himself on being able to broil a steak. Onions cut in cubes and served in vinegar was his own exclusive dish. He would urge you to partake declaring it a dish fit for the gods. "Both palatable and pungent," he would say. Long years after, one of our crowd met him in New York and he invited her to lunch with him. The first item in his order was onion soup. "Both palatable and pungent," he said in quick remembrance.

Will Porter's position in the Land Office had been a political one, so in 1891 when his friend, Dick Hall, the former Land Commissioner, ran for Governor and

was defeated, Will Porter's job was given to some supporter of Governor Hogg. He then secured a position as paying and receiving teller and sometimes bookkeeper, in the First National Bank of Austin. The duties of the new position were arduous and exacting. He was not happy in his work as he had been in the General Land Office. The old Land Office building, itself, in its history and architecture was an unfailing source of interest to Will Porter. The "medieval castle" as he called it, with its spiral stairway worn by the feet of countless soldiers of fortune who helped make Texas the great State that it is. Everything about this picturesque old building appealed to his imagination. In "Baxar Script No. 2692" and "Georgia's Ruling," these two splendid examples of his art, we see the old Land Office in Austin and the influence of tradition. However, his banking experience, also, was used in after life as a subject for his stories. In *Friends in San Rosario,* there are echoes of bank experience. Drugstore, ranch, Land Office, bank; it mattered not. They were all so much grist in his mill.

In the summer of 1893 there was an unusual state of restlessness and stir in Austin. The Chicago World's Fair was calling to the citizens of this Southern city very persistently. The number of people who were planning to answer the call was amazing. Practically everyone who was not tied down by business demands

and could raise the price was going. Mr. and Mrs. Roach were among those and Athol was keen to join them. Will Porter insisted that a change would do her good. He had saved a little money. He knew no better way to invest it. Those who went early returned with marvelous tales about what they had seen. The educational advantages were set forth so wonderfully that to remain at home was to lose the opportunity of a lifetime. Perhaps there was never a national affair so promoted and so advertised. Athol caught the enthusiasm and was keen for the trip. But what should she do with little Margaret? It was decided that Mr. and Mrs. Roach were to go first to the great razzle-dazzle of 1893 and on their return were to take charge of Margaret while Athol joined a party of friends later in the season to snatch her share of the joy and culture being handed out in the "Windy City."

However, Athol had a change of heart. When Mrs. Roach returned home she looked across the street at Athol's cottage. There were crisp new muslin curtains blowing from Athol's windows and two new wicker chairs on the porch. She went over to see what this meant. Athol met her at the door, her face wreathed in smiles. She lead her mother into the house and showed her the new matting she had just finished putting down. "Isn't that a beautiful Japanese pattern?" she questioned.

The cottage where O. Henry and his young wife lived in 1893, when Athol sacrificed her trip to the Chicago World's Fair to buy new matting and other comforts, in anticipation of a visit from "Miss Lina," O. Henry's beloved aunt.

(Just substitute "Old Charley" and the buggy for the modern automobile.)

"But Athol," gasped Mrs. Roach, "where did you get the money, child?"

"Will gave it to me and I used it this way," she explained.

"But your trip? Where is the money for your trip?" her mother persisted. "Did you spend the money for your *trip* on these things?"

"Yes, I did; and I'm glad I did," Athol defied. "I just couldn't go on a jaunt and leave Will here to work all summer and not have any fun. Now he'll have just as much fun out of the money as I do. You see I bought *two* rockers. I'm playing fair." She then explained that she had bought the things without Will's knowledge and had worked all morning to get the curtains up and the matting down before he got home, or Mrs. Roach returned from her trip. She made up her mind that this was what she wanted to do, and she would not give anybody a chance to argue her out of it. When I was in Austin four years ago Mrs. Roach recalled this incident, though I had known of it at the time, for I was one of the first friends to admire the new matting and sit in the new wicker rocker. It was one of the times I was urged to stay to supper and partake of a broiled steak that Will Porter insisted he could cook in a very superior way. He shared the universal delusion of men that what they don't know about cooking has never been written, though their ex-

perience may have been confined to boiling an egg and slicing a tomato.

In recalling this incident of Athol's unselfishness and thoughtfulness of others, there is another occurrance which Mrs. Roach and I discussed when I was last in Austin. It deserves mention.

In the summer of 1895 there was a pathetically poor family living in an old dilapidated house near the Porter cottage. A young girl of the family, about sixteen years old, was very ill. She had been in bed for weeks with tuberculosis. We had no health nurses in those days to see to the comforts and needs of such people. They were dependent on the individual kindness of neighbors. The pathos of her case appealed to Athol strongly. Never a day passed that she did not take the girl something to tempt her appetite. Usually the girl partook of the food with relish, but the time came when she ceased to enjoy anything, but insisted that she wanted "the pretty Mrs. Porter" to come to talk to her. Athol went every day.

Athol had two rings that the sick girl admired very much. One was made from a pair of diamond earrings that had been her mother's, the other from a diamond stud that Will Porter had given her. They were very beautiful rings. She had them on one evening when she heard the poor girl was worse and was asking for her. When she went into the sick-room the girl saw the

rings and said: "O, Mrs. Porter, may I see those rings? Let me put them on just once." Of course, Athol let her put them on. With a face illumined with joy the sick girl lay admiring the jewels on her poor bony fingers. She would turn her hand weakly so the stones would catch the light. There was a new sparkle in her eyes, a new brightness in her face. It was as if a cherished dream had been fulfilled, a hope realized. And who knows what dreams had come to that girl of riches and diamonds? When the time came for Athol to leave she could not ask the girl for the rings. She knew that the worldly pleasures of the sick girl had been so few and she could not take away that bit of joy. She would leave them with her until tomorrow.

There was no tomorrow for the sick girl. Her mother told Mrs. Roach that she fell asleep quite early in the night with Athol's rings pressed to her cheek, a smile of dreams come true on her face. "In that sleep of death what dreams may come?" Early the next morning the girl's heartbroken mother returned Athol's rings tied up in the corner of a handkerchief. "I took them away from her as soon as she died, and hid them away," she said in a hushed whisper. "You know we got all sorts of men folks 'round our place."

When we discussed this incident Mrs. Roach said: "I have often wondered if Athol's frequent visits to that sick girl, and allowing her to wear her rings, had any-

thing to do with Athol developing the disease. It was not many months later that the blow came. Thirty years ago we believed more in heredity than we did in germs. Today we believe more in germs. Ah well, it was all in God's hands! Athol was laying up treasures in heaven."

* * *

V.

I HAVE passed over a very happy summer that deserves mention. It was spent in the Hall home—an old brick house all but concealed among the cedars. It is now dilapidated and decayed. This place is across the river from Austin, opposite Barton's Spring. There is a marvelous view of Austin from the hill on which the Hall home stands. The church spires glisten in the sun and the massive dome of the State Capitol rises high above this city of homes and spreading lawns. The Halls were away on the ranch that summer and invited Athol and Will Porter to gather a congenial group of friends and occupy the home on the hill in their absence. It was a beautiful summer for all and one long to be remembered. Will Porter was particularly delighted at the experience on little Margaret's account. He wanted her, he said, "To know the joys of chasing chickens and getting redbugs on her legs."

Will Porter would hurry home from the bank in the afternoon and they would all go for a swim over at Barton's. Sometimes he would fish. At night they would sit on the lawn and sing *In the Evening by the*

Moonlight and all the old favorites. Beneath them, across the river the tower lights of Austin would shine like clustering glow worms of marvelous brilliance, enhancing the view from the hill where the Hall home stood, hidden among the sturdy oaks and cedars—a wonderful place to dream away the summer evenings, swap stories of local romance, and smoke the cigar of idleness. For there is no dearth of romance in and around Austin.

In delving in the files in the State Library recently I came across some marvelous tales of true adventure that puts fiction to shame. One story of a buried treassure had made a great impression on Will Porter's romantic mind. It was a fantastic tale of a soldier of fortune, who, when deciding to join the Southern army in the Sixties, buried, with the help of an old negro slave, a chest of gold and silver and precious stones near a certain oak in the Groom's woodland near Austin. The soldier was killed. The negro was robbed of his map of the ground where the chest was buried. The robber was in turn murdered and the map lost. It is claimed that Will Porter was one of the interested youths of Austin who used to go out to the Groom's woodland and speculate as to where the treasure was buried. It is said that he even did a bit of digging. It is natural that this disciple of "What's around the corner?" should have taken part in this fanciful adventure,

or, at least, have viewed the spot "in the evening by the moonlight."

It was not only the picturesque and romantic that Will Porter liked to view. He delighted in studying his fellow man in his working shirt. Lower Pecan Street, where mules and ponies were bought and exchanged, where the cotton yards were piled high with bales of this Southern staple, where the Mexican quarter chilli and tamale stands gave a pungent invitation, was a favorite "bumming" section with Will Porter. He was a realist in life as in art. He liked to see both sides of a picture. Although he recognized and loved the beauty of the capital city of Texas and the blue-crested hills, the streams, and the bluebonnet fields, he spent but little time contemplating them. He loved flowers, not so much for the sake of the flowers, but for the human suggestion that they gave him. In one of his stories he tells us, "Where there is a geranium blooming in the window, you may know there is a real woman." In another he speaks of petunias as suggestive of a woman of gentle birth. He felt the influence of these things subtly.

The only materials that he knew for woman's apparel, were, as he said himself, dimity and crêpe de chine. These had individual meaning for him. Athol wore dimity and his second wife crêpe de chine.

That Will Porter's chief study had always been "the

four million" and not "the four hundred" is shown in his cartoons as well as in his stories. His breadth of comprehension is that of a man whose eyes have seen clearly and heart loved broadly. The subject of his mother's graduating essay, *"The Influence of Misfortune on the Gifted,"* was certainly fully demonstrated in O. Henry's case. The ill health that sent him to Texas, the loss of his position in the General Land Office, his unfortunate banking experience, the long illness and death of his beloved wife, his trial and unjust conviction, were the largest factors in making him the most human, the most understanding, the greatest short story writer America has ever produced.

It would not have been human for Will Porter to have gone through this series of experiences without sometimes becoming moody and depressed. At times he would be the life of a group, at others silent and gloomy. These attacks of gloom came upon him while he was working in the bank and the worries of that arduous position hung heavily upon him. The bank was, and had always been, managed in a very loose way, it was claimed. Directors, officers and stockholders were perfectly at home behind the rail and took a hand in helping themselves when they wanted a check cashed. It was a kind of club, so established long before Will Porter's time. The conditions were harrowing for the bookkeeper and paying teller. Day after

O. Henry's young wife, Athol Estes Porter, and daughter, Margaret. O. Henry carried this picture in an inside coat pocket for many years.

day Will Porter would come home worried by some piece of carelessness in the management that had kept him long over hours balancing his books. He would have resigned, but there was nothing else in sight to do.

On the side he started *The Rolling Stone,* that famous humorous sheet, that put him in bad with some of the powers that were. He could not live on the earnings of *The Rolling Stone.* He had to support his wife, who was far from strong, and little Margaret, so he stayed on at the bank, struggled over his books and accounts, and did the best he could.

On one occasion he spent two days hunting a hundred dollar shortage. At the end of the time he mentioned the shortage to one of the officers. "O yes," said this man, "I took out a hundred the other day when I went over to San Antonio and forgot to file a slip for it. Sorry I gave you such a hunt." Little wonder that at such a bank disaster hung "right around the corner."

Athol told me that the last summer he was in the bank Will Porter would hardly take time to eat his lunch when he came home at noon. "I have to get back," he would say. "I don't know what is going on while I am gone." At this period he was not always bright and cheerful. This was the summer of 1895. I was married that September and left the State, so I tried to see as much as possible of my old friends. I was with Athol one day and she was giving me some

pointers concerning the management of a husband, a deeply interesting subject for a bride-elect.

"I have found out one thing," she said. "If a man comes home gloomy and depressed, don't ask him what's the matter. It peeves him. Let him alone. If he wants to tell you he will. Just go about looking cheerful and set as good a meal before him as you can. After he eats he will usually tell you what is on his mind. If he doesn't, let him alone. Get out some bit of fancy work—shirts or socks preferred. The first time you find a chance, wedge in a smile, then, if he begins to look human, ask what he would like to have for the next meal. Food is always a safe and interesting subject."

With such an understanding wife the summer of 1895 passed. Conditions at the bank did not improve. Clouds were banking ominously on Will Porter's horizon. The harrassing and unbusinesslike conditions had gotten on his nerves. He would rush home for the noon meal, change his limp collar for a fresh one, and hurry back to the bank. "You have an hour, why don't you rest and cool off?" Athol would suggest. "No," he would answer, "I must get back. The longer I stay away, the more trouble I have. Sometimes I think I had best not leave at noon. I spend hours hunting up money that has been carelessly checked out." No wonder that finally the crash came.

A zealous bank examiner, just such an one, no doubt, as Will Porter describes in *Friends in San Rosario,* came swooping down on the First National Bank of Austin and demanded "the pound of flesh." Will Porter, the paying and receiving teller, and sometimes bookkeeper, was slaughtered. The bank officials, understanding conditions, made up the shortage and refused to prosecute, but the Federal authorities were obdurate. This bank and its methods had given them trouble enough. Somebody had to be punished, somebody had to pay, so Will Porter, a victim of circumstance, was made an example. Why was this? There are many, including his mother-in-law, Mrs. Roach, who believed with strict Presbyterian faith, that it was foreordained that he should drink these dregs of injustice to perfect his knowledge of human and inhuman nature. "All things work together for good." But ah, the bitterness, the humiliation of it! His trial and conviction show us the true greatness of O. Henry, for he rose above all bitterness.

However, we are anticipating our story. We must go back a little. When Mr. Roach brought the news to Mrs. Roach that Will Porter had been held responsible for the shortage in the bank, she was appalled at the thought of telling Athol. Athol had been far from well for some months and the old fear concerning her had entered the hearts and minds of those who loved

her. To Mrs. Roach, the fear had become a conviction that she had tuberculosis. The thought of giving her this dire news was terrifying. She begged Mr. Roach to go over and tell her, saying "I can't tell her, I simply can't. But I will go over and comfort her." So Mr. Roach went across the street and broke the news as best he could. When Mrs. Roach found Athol she was crumpled up on the bed, her face buried in a pillow, crying as though her heart would break. Directly, the clock struck four. Instantly, Athol was on her feet. She seemed suddenly electrified with courage and determination. "It's four o'clock," she said. "Will will be at home any minute. I musn't act like this. He shan't find me crying." And he didn't. He found her dressed in a crisp, blue dimity that he loved, sweet and fresh and dainty, her head held a bit higher than usual. There were no traces of tears on her face. Her courage never failed him.

Was there ever a more pathetic story in the history of experience than that of these two young people, Athol and Will Porter, from October 1895 to June 1896? I left the State in September, so I was not in Austin at the time the crash came, nor during the hectic months that followed. What I have learned has been from friends and relatives who were in Austin at that time, and, of course, I followed the newspaper accounts.

Mr. Roach and a group of Will Porter's friends

went on his bond. He was free for a time. But he did not want to stay in Austin. His pride had been touched. He grew reticent, and avoided friends. The injustice of the thing did not make him bitter, but seemed to wound him unspeakably. He secured a position on the *Houston Post* and moved his family to Houston. They sold their treasured belongings, collected with so much pleasure and pride—the wicker chairs, the bedroom suite with admired mirrors included. The salary on the *Post* was small, inadequate for a family of three. Though the fatal malady was hanging grimly over Athol, she tried valiantly to be cheerful and optimistic. Will Porter always hated to write society items—a part of his work on the *Post*—so Athol helped him with these. With his "Postscripts" on the *Post* he maintained his reputation for spontaneous humor. It had to be done. It was his daily bread. It was a heroic gesture during the stress and strain of those months. I was going through the files of the *Houston Post* not long ago, re-reading those "Postscripts," with their versatile and inimitable humor and was filled with wonder at the man. When the spring term of court rolled around his case was postponed until September. All through the summer of 1896 he worked on the *Post* writing his "Postscripts" with never failing humor.

VI.

AT the end of a long, hot summer he had to return to Austin to face his trial. He knew the humor of the Federal authorities and dreaded the worst. Athol showed the strain of anxiety and the heat. The brave fight she had made to appear cheerful and optimistic was telling on her strength. He persuaded her to return to Austin ahead of him, and visit some friends en route. She needed the change. Colonel Johnson of the *Houston Post* was very fond of Will Porter. He promised Athol to look after her husband and keep him cheered. She little thought that September day when he put little Margaret and her on the train, promising to join them in Austin, that it would be many months before she saw him again.

The newspapers of 1896 were filled with accounts of the great opportunities offered the enterprising and progressive young man in Honduras—the land of the little banana. In the *Post* there were some humorous references to "Honduras, on the Mosquito Coast" written by O. Henry. He was credited with writing this menu—"Pale Ale, Chicken with Herbs, Rum, Fricas-

see of Young Monkey, Rye Whiskey, Green Turtle with Broth, Brandy and Soda, Oysters, Pale Ale." Without doubt the stories of Honduras intrigued him. He had a knowledge of Spanish, acquired in his ranch experience.

When Will Porter left Houston to return to Austin to face his trial that was to come up in the September term of court, he bought a ticket for Austin. The idea of not returning to Austin seemed not to have entered his head. His intention to stand trial was undoubted. Why he changed his plans is one of the mysteries that has never been satisfactorily explained. We can merely surmise and wonder. One writer says: "His imagination outran his reason." Also; "His knowledge of Spanish and his ignorance of Honduras made the Central American republic seem just the haven in which to cast anchor." Be that as it may, the facts are these.

Fifty miles from Houston, on the Houston and Texas Central Railroad, is the little town of Hempstead, the county seat of Waller County. It is a town rich in traditions and thrilling history. It was in this county that the famous Loggins-Morris murder was committed. The stories of the lurid deeds of old Mr. Reuben Loggins, who lived in a big white house with a cupelo on the top, were widely known and discussed. There was the Kirby-Steele shooting and sensational trial. Hempstead and Waller county were famous in the State. It

was in this town that Will Porter had to change cars for Austin. Austin is on a branch road of the Houston and Texas Central. Whether he inadvertently or purposely let the train for Austin leave him in Hempstead will never be known.

I know that stories of Hempstead and Waller County had always interested him. As a child it had been my home. I was born five miles from Hempstead. My father and mother went to Texas after the War Between the States to retrieve fortune. In the days of the Texas Republic my father had bought land in Waller County and I had often regaled Athol and Will Porter with stories of Waller—dramatic episodes of my childhood. I recall Will Porter telling me once, "I'd like to have a look around at that place." It has always been my theory that he was taking "a look around" at Hempstead, viewing, possibly, the old court house where so many dramatic trials of murderers, cattle-rustlers, horse thieves and the like were held—when the train for Austin pulled out and left him. On such small things are decisions made! He was, naturally, loath to return to Austin, where he felt sure the trial would go against him. He could not prove his innocence. The shortage was there, unaccounted for. The indictment charged that on October 10th, 1894, there was a shortage of $554.48; on November 12th, 1894, $299.60, and on November 12, 1895, $297.60. A total

DRAFTSMAN ROOM, GENERAL LAND OFFICE, AUSTIN, TEXAS, 1887

Will Porter is seen in the center of this group. It was here he was working when he was married to Athol Estes.

of $1,151.60. He knew how this had come about, but what could he prove? He was aware of the temper of the Federal authorities. There had been too much carelessness in this bank, someone must pay. Will Porter felt that he was predestined to be the goat. He thought of his wife growing steadily worse, while he was shut up in a Federal prison. He realized that she had not long to live. If he could only go where he could have her and little Margaret with him! Perhaps a change of climate would be good for her. He dreaded the humiliation of the trial for himself and for his beloved wife. His was a sensitive nature. It was more than he could bear—the injustice, the immeasurable mortification!

When a train pulled in from the North, bound for New Orleans and freedom, Will Porter boarded it. He would go to Honduras, the land of Romance and Opportunity and make a new start. There, Athol and little Margaret could join him. Soon it would be winter. A sojourn in that far Southern climate might save Athol's life. Thus, I believe, he reasoned, for two months later (he had spent some time in New Orleans) Athol received a letter from him from Honduras, begging that they come to him, and saying that he felt convinced a change of climate was just what she needed, and that he had been looking around for a school in which they could place little Margaret. Margaret was

now of school age. The pathos, the tragedy of it! His letter came too late. Athol was far too weak to undertake such a journey. And had she been able, she could hardly have joined Will Porter without betraying his whereabouts. Their correspondence was carried on through a friend and the greatest caution was taken, for the long arm of Uncle Sam is no respecter of persons.

I have been told that Athol said the hardest letter she ever wrote in her life was this one to Will Porter telling him that she could not come to him and realizing that he could not come to her. Nor could she tell him that the news that he had forfeited his bond had made her worse, much worse. The courage and loyalty with which she faced this fact and defended him against the clamor of censure that arose, filled the people of Austin with a new love and admiration for the wife. Her staunchness and her faith never faltered. Though running a temperature every day, she took a correspondence course to fit her to make a living for Margaret and herself. Always expert with a needle, she made dresses for neighbors, and sat up late at night doing fancy work which she sold to a friendly merchant.

The thought that her stepfather, Mr. Roach, would lose money as one of Will Porter's bondsmen, made her all the more determined to be self-supporting. Both Mr. and Mrs. Roach plead with her to rest more and work less, but Athol was determined not to be depen-

dent. Mrs. Roach tells of Mr. Roach's devotion to Athol and his anxiety concerning her during this period. "He would make," says Mrs. Roach, "all sorts of excuses to get her out of the house, away from her work, and in the fresh air. He would hitch old Charley to the phaeton and send her on errands, forgetting things purposely when he went down town as excuse to get Athol out. He moved the hay out of the loft and turned it into a playhouse for Margaret and persuaded her to spend much time with her little girl. It was a beautiful playhouse where all the children in the neighborhood would congregate. He thought that the odor of fresh hay was good for the lungs."

Weeks passed. As the Christmas season approached Athol sold a lace handkerchief she had made for twenty-five dollars to one of the merchants of Austin. She was very happy for it meant that she could send Will Porter a Christmas box. All of the little luxuries of which she knew he was fond and some of the necessities that she felt he needed in that far away Honduras were packed into the box with infinite love and care. One of the gifts was a bottle of perfume of which she knew he was fond. Into the box Mrs. Roach secretly slipped this note: "Will, you should come home. Athol packed this box running a temperature of 105."

It was the fifth of February. It had been a cold day. It was a colder night. The wind moaned dismally.

There had been nothing heard from Will Porter since the Christmas box had been sent. Athol had grown steadily worse, but she was up and about. No day found her in bed. Her indomitable energy never flagged. All day she had been restless, going to the door and looking out as though expecting someone. That night when bed-time came she asked Mrs. Roach not to lock the front door. Without asking any questions Mrs. Roach complied with the request. Athol seemed wakeful and restless. About midnight Mrs. Roach heard a step on the porch. Athol sprang from her bed. Then a cry:

"My darling, My darling!" Will Porter had come home.

So in sympathy were the police and other authorities of Austin with the brave little wife, fighting the battle of death, that they ignored Will Porter's presence in the city, and sent him word that if he would keep out of sight during his wife's illness they would not molest him. He was left free to stay in the Roach home indefinitely and to drive with Athol in the shadows of evening. The winter days were spent mostly in the hay-loft playhouse, telling "Uncle Remus" stories to Margaret and her little friends, or cheering Athol with tales of adventure. He would seldom see friends who called. He seemed to shrink from contact with them. I suppose he felt that his course of action had been

indefensible, and he did not want to discuss the matter. His evenings were spent, whenever the weather would permit, behind old Charley driving Athol along by-roads in search of health. Mr. Smith tells us in his *Biography* that they were often seen on Sunday night sitting in the buggy in the shadow of the Presbyterian Church listening to the choir, of which they both had been members, sing the familiar hymns. They would sit there until the service was over, then, before the congregation came out, would drive quietly away. To the little church girl, raised in the old fashioned way, what a benediction this must have been to her hungry soul!

The return of Will Porter seemed to have again stayed the hand of the grim harvester. For a time Athol appeared amazingly improved. She was pathetically cheerful and hopeful. Her prayer had been, "Please God, let me live to see Will once more." Her prayer now was, "Please God, let me live to see his name cleared." His return had given her a new incentive to live. She wanted to fight the thing out at the earliest possible opportunity. She realized that his going away had given the appearance of guilt. But, glorious fact, he had returned! Returned of his own free will. She fairly radiated with joy at the thought. People surely would acknowledge his innocence!

Springtime came. Athol, in spite of her strong will, was growing weaker again. When she no longer had

strength to walk, Will Porter would carry her in his arms, put her in the phaeton and drive her out in the bluebonnet fields where the birds sang and beauty was everywhere. They no longer waited for night to come for these drives. So ill was she, that no condition was any longer laid upon his movements. He had the sympathy of all who knew them and watched Athol's brave fight. He was doing all in his power to help in her battle but aid was beyond human power. On Sunday, July 25th, she died. I have been told that so great was her energy, so determined was she that her prayer be answered—"Please God, let me live to see his name cleared"—that the only day she remained in bed was the day she died.

I take the following from the *Austin Statesman* of Monday, July 26th, 1897:

"Mrs. Athol Estes Porter, wife of W. S. Porter, died Sunday evening, July 25th, at 6:30 o'clock at the residence of her father, G. P. Roach. Funeral services at the family residence, 307 East Fourth Street, at ten o'clock Tuesday morning. Friends of the family invited to attend."

Austin Statesman, Tuesday, July 27th, 1897:

"This morning at ten o'clock the funeral services of Mrs. Athol Estes Porter, wife of Will Porter, will be conducted at the family residence, 307 Fourth Street. Mrs. Porter's death was a sad blow to all her relatives and friends. For some months now it has been evident that she was a victim of that dread disease, consumption, and while her end was assured, its fast approach when she was in the

prime of life caused one and all to feel the pity that is ever attendant on the cutting off of life in the hour of youth. Mrs. Porter leaves a husband and one child to mourn her loss. She was a woman known and beloved by many. She made many friends while yet a young girl in this city, and her married life was but a continuation of that girlhood so far as the moulding of friendship's chain is concerned. All will regret her untimely end and will join the *Statesman* in extending sympathy to the bereaved relatives and friends."

Austin Statesman, Sunday, August 1st, 1897:

In Memoriam

"Mrs. Athol Estes Porter, beloved wife of William S. Porter, and daughter of Mrs. G. P. Roach, was born in Clarksville, Tennessee, April 19th, 1868, and died at Austin, Texas, July 25th, 1897.

"Mrs. Porter's early childhood was spent in Nashville, Tennessee, but about 1878 her parents removed to Texas and since that date her home has been in this city. She received a liberal education and was an unusually bright and lovable girl, whose sunny disposition reflected happiness on all around her. She was exceedingly fond of music, and for many years was a member of the Austin Musical Union, her sweet voice and pleasing personality lending much to the entertainments given by that once famous organization. Athol Estes and Will Porter were married on July 1st, 1887. Their marriage was one of those congenial unions with the star of Love constantly in the ascendancy regardless of material conditions. One child, sweet little Margaret, was born to them and lives to mourn the loss of her precious mother. Too many words of praise could not be spoken of this gentle little woman—always so bright and brave and hopeful. Can more be said than this? She was a true Christian, a faithful wife and mother. We will not think of her as dead but ever living in the brightness of her eternal home."

I give these notices as they appeared in the Austin papers more than a quarter century ago to demonstrate

the fact that the life and character of Athol Estes Porter was appreciated by the people of Austin as well as by the friend who has collected this material in loving remembrance. So little has been written concerning this first wife of O. Henry, so little known by the general public about this unusually charming woman, whose love story was so beautiful and yet so sad, that I felt a distinct urge to write of her and set forth what it was my privilege to know. It has so often been wondered at that O. Henry spoke of her so seldom. To me it was no wonder, knowing the man. The sacred things, like the love he bore his young wife, were too personal, too precious to be talked and written about. Austin was to him, "A sacred city of silence, a shrine hallowed and hidden."

This picture was taken in 1895 when the shadow of disaster hung heavily over O. Henry and his little family.

His wife, as is easily seen, was already ill.

VII.

AT the time of his wife's death, the abject misery of Will Porter was pitiable in the extreme. It was made more pathetic by an aloofness, a desire to be by himself, that he maintained. He seemed to realize the need of little Margaret for comfort and solace and rallied to the claim. When no one else could soothe the child on the day of her mother's death he took her in his arms and away from the house. It was a hot, sultry night. With old Charley and the buggy he drove Margaret out in the country where they could be alone with God and the stars. After awhile her sobs ceased and she slept. Back to the Roach home he came with Margaret. Lifting the sleeping child, he started to take her in the house. But Margaret awoke and wept again. Another hour was spent in driving aimlessly about. Each time he would return and start with the child into the house her tears would start afresh. It was almost midnight before he finally put her to sleep. The rest of the night he spent on the porch beside the hammock, swinging Margaret gently to keep her soothed and asleep.

The second night was a repetition of the first. They drove until almost midnight. Margaret, frantic with fear if he left her for a moment, fearful that he, too, would "go away for good." Again he sat beside the hammock until morning dawned. All though that trying ordeal he never left the little girl whose nervous fears made her cling to him constantly. Hopeless, utterly forlorn, he seemed to avoid friends and sympathy, but clung to little Margaret and she to him with pathetic aloofness. No doubt it was a time of bitterness as well as grief to Will Porter, for he saw men at his wife's funeral who might have cleared his name. Men, not fundamentally dishonest, but whose criminal carelessness had been his undoing, had brought disgrace upon him and had harrowed the heart and mind of his beloved wife. For his own weakness at a critical moment and the anxious months he had given her, he had no defense. Little wonder he stood apart in bitterness, regret, and grief. His shabby suit, his battered hat, his worn shoes, were symbolic of what he felt—"O well, what matters anything now?"

Will Porter would not go out in the carriage with the family to the cemetery, but requested that he be allowed to go alone with Margaret and drive old Charley. During the services at the grave they sat apart until all had left the cemetery, then he and little Margaret went over to Athol's new-made grave and ar-

ranged the flowers, remaining there for hours. "Ah well, what does anything matter now?" was in his whole bearing.

It was in this same attitude of mind that he stood trial a few months later. His attorney is quoted as saying that he never had so uncommunicative a client. There was no fight in him. He seemed absolutely indifferent to the outcome. He requested friends as an especial favor to stay away from the courtroom. It has been alleged that both his and his attorney's minds were befogged by over-indulgence all during the trial. This statement appears true from some of the points that came up in the trial that passed unchallenged. Will Porter is quoted as having said that when he saw the jury that he knew he had no chance. It was composed of men who at that time "viewed all banks with suspicion, and thought all bankers thieves." Bankers being interpreted in their minds as all men who worked in banks. Knowing this he had remained silent and his attorney made no objection to the jurors.

The indictment charged, as I have mentioned before, that on October 10th, 1894, Will Porter had misappropriated $554.48, on November 12th, 1894, $299.60, and on November 12th, 1895, $297.60. So indifferent were both Will Porter and his attorney that the fact was never pointed out to the jury that on November 12th, 1895 he had severed all connection with the bank. Pro-

fessor Alfonso Smith mentions this in his comprehensive *Biography*. I have only one fault to find with this *Biography of O. Henry*. It has too little to say concerning Athol Estes and her influence on O. Henry's life.

In further discussing the O. Henry trial Professor Smith says, that Will Porter was convicted at Hempstead, not Austin. That it was this charge that convicted him: "Your grand jurors further say that between the days of the sixth of July A. D., 1896, and the fifth of February A. D., 1897, the aforesaid W. S. Porter was fugitive from justice and seeking to avoid prosecution in this court" did have a big effect on the jury and the public mind. He would have, however, had a good chance of being cleared had he fought the case himself, or seemingly taken any interest in its outcome. His attitude was not that of a guilty man but of a broken-hearted one. Unfortunately it had the effect of guilt. He combated nothing, and allowed the public to think as it liked. The friends, even, who were all for him in the beginning, began to stand back and wonder. It's a busy world. Public opinion is formed hurriedly by the side that presents facts and figures. When these were left uncombated, unchallenged, we have an unfair verdict nine times out of ten. The trial left his friends wondering, his enemies convinced. And he had enemies. Some very influential political ones whom he

had offended by holding up their weaknesses to ridicule, good natured ridicule to be sure, but none the less resented, in his inimitable publication, *The Rolling Stone.*

Today there seems to be an absolute unanimity of view point in Austin regarding Will Porter. I fail to find a single man or woman who would entertain for a moment the thought that Will Porter was guilty. In talking, recently, to a prominent banker of Austin, who, like myself, had known Will Porter back in the Eighties, he said: "It might just as well have been me as Will Porter. I applied for that position in the First National Bank when Will Porter got it. He was older and had more experience, so they gave him the job. I thought he was fortunate and I was out of luck, but it was the other way around. Had I gotten the job, I would have been sent up. The Federal authorities were tired of that bank's methods and they had to make a killing. However, he just cinched things at Hempstead when he flew the coop."

Will Porter wrote to his mother-in-law a short time after his commitment: "I am absolutely innocent of wrong doing in that bank matter, except in so far as foolishly keeping a position that I could not successfully fill." It is the only reference that I have ever heard that he, himself, made to the affair.

Mrs. Roach, a woman of rare breadth of mind, sees in her daughter's life and sad death the workings of her

Presbyterian faith. She believes that suffering and depth of experince were necessary to develop the best that was in Will Porter and to create the great O. Henry. Mrs. Roach discussed *"The Influence of Misfortune on the Gifted"* in quite an understanding way, just as Will Porter's own mother had done forty years earlier in that graduating essay.

I do not feel that Athol's influence ended that July day in 1897. It lived on to the end of O. Henry's life. Little Margaret, studying her lessons, sitting at the same quaint old table where Athol as a child had sat, said to her grandmother one night: "Munny, did you see mama looking over my shoulder?" "No," was the answer. "Well, I did," said Margaret. "She comes every night to help me with my lessons." Will Porter was in prison at Columbus at the time, working on those early stories. Mrs. Roach wrote him of the incident. He replied: "Well, Margaret isn't the only one. Some day I will tell you of a similar experience."

When Will Porter married a second time, Mrs. Roach was pleased. I thought it showed a very lovely spirit. Will Porter had spent some very lonely years and she felt that he deserved the happiness that companionship brings. In speaking of his relationship to her, Mrs. Roach said: "He was ever courteous and considerate. The gentleman always. As fond as he was of a joke, he never made one with a sting. I recall that

someone once told a mother-in-law joke in his presence. I did not mind, but he resented it promptly. 'Jokes like that make me sick; they don't appeal to my sense of humor', he said quite seriously. He was always nice to me. After his second marriage he wrote me one of the finest letters I ever read. He wrote that he wantd me 'to begin right' by spending the summer with them. But I didn't go. Not that summer, I couldn't. I wanted to get used to the thought of his being married again first. But I really was glad. Men are so dependent."

Mrs. Roach told of the only time that Will Porter was the least cross or impatient with her. The story was this: Once when she was ill in Pittsburgh (the Roach family went to Pittsburgh to live for a period after Will Porter's trial and conviction) a letter came addressed to Will Porter in her care. He was at that time in New York, but the writer did not have his address. Being ill when the letter was received it was carelessly laid aside and forgotten. She did not think of the letter until a year later when she was visiting Will Porter in New York. In unpacking her trunk she came upon it, then months old. She took it to him and it proved to be a letter from Mr. Edward M. House, who afterwards became the Warwick of the Wilson administration. Mr. House was asking Will Porter to edit a book he had written, an assignment that would have brought him in some much needed

money. Can we wonder he was cross? Mrs. Roach made Will Porter write and explain the matter to Mr. House, but it was too late to render the service desired. Mrs. Roach finished the story with this anecdote, so characteristic of O. Henry. A short time after this occurrence Will met Mr. House at a banquet. "I trust," said the latter that the incident of the letter made no permanent difference between yourself and your mother-in-law?" "Oh no," rejoined Will Porter, "we still smile as we pass the salt."

In going through the files of *The Houston Post* I came across "Some Postscripts" of O. Henry's that I have never seen in any published collection of his writings. Each seems to tell of a mood a little foreign to O. Henry's usual style. The following seems a bit personal. The date is April 3rd, 1896:

"Do not look so sad," said Freddie,
"Be as cheerful as you can,
Be for sorrow ever ready,
Face your troubles like a man."

"Alas! I cannot face my troubles,"
Said Augustus, glum and sour.
"They are where I cannot face them,
Fellow kicked me half an hour."

This was written just three months before he decided that he could not face his troubles and went to Honduras.

There were two "Postscripts" under date of June 3rd. One was "The Sunday Excursionist":

"He occupies all the vacant seats in the car with his accomplices and lets his accursed good nature spray over the rest of the passengers. He is so accursedly happy that he wants everybody, to the brakesman on the rear car, to know it. He is devilishly agreeable, so perniciously jolly and so abominably entertaining that people who were born with or have acquired brains love him most vindictively.

"The female Sunday Excursionist usually accompanies him. She brings her laugh with her and does a turn in the pauses of his low comedy work. She never by any accident muffles her laugh or allows it to get out of curl. It ripples naturally and conforms readily to the size of the car. She puts on the male Sunday excursionist's hat, and he puts on hers, and if the other passengers are feeling worse than usual, they sing 'Swannee River'. There is enough woe and sorrow in the world without augmenting it in this way. Men who have braved the deepest troubles and emerged unscathed from the heaviest afflictions have gone down with a shriek of horror and despair before the fatal hilarity of the Sunday excursionist."

The following, which appeared in the *Post* of the same date, is the only altogether serious bit of writing that I have ever seen from his pen. It is to me one of the most beautiful things he ever wrote, though I do not agree entirely with his position. It comes as a kind of benediction.

"Decoration day has passed, and the graves of the Northern and Southern soldiers have been duly flower strewn, as is meet and fitting. The valor of the North has been told on a thousand rostrums, and the courage of the South has been related from ten hundred platforms. Battles have been fought again and redoubts retaken. Much has been said of brotherly love and bridging of the chasm. The Blue

has marched abreast to the common meeting place, the Gray has marched abreast and they have met and shaken hands and said the war is over. . . There can be no such thing as a union of the Blue and the Gray. When we pronounce the words we form the bar that separates them. The Blue is one thing and the Gray is another. There should be no more Blue and no more Gray. If a tribute is to be paid to the heroes on either side whom we wish to keep in remembrance, it should be made by American citizens not divided by the color of their garments. There is no need to march by grand armies, by camps, by posts. If there is to be a shaking of hands, let it be done by one citizen of the United States with another. The Gray and the Blue are the things of the past. In the innermost hearts, in the still quick memories of the South, the Gray will always live, but it should live as in a shrine, hallowed and hidden from pomp and display. As citizens of a common country, we of the South offer our hands to the citizens of the North in peace and fellowship, but we do not mingle the Gray with the Blue."

It is said that O. Henry's last words to the nurse who attended him in his final illness were: "Put up the shades, please. I don't want to go home in the dark." He little realized how much light and life he was leaving behind for posterity to enjoy and appreciate. He did not go home in the dark.

It is interesting to note that five of the outstanding figures in the Wilson administration were contemporaries of O. Henry in Austin, Texas, and that but for the careless loss of a letter the most prominent of them, Colonel House, might have heralded O. Henry's fame. But of all of the international figures who have come out of Austin, it is safe to say, not one will share the immortality that is O. Henry's. When students

will skim the lines in history that make mention of these outstanding names of today, these same students will linger with laughter and tears over the stories of O. Henry.

Colonel Edward M. House, "the power behind the throne" of the Wilson administratiton lived in Austin and married Miss Lula Hunter, one of the belles of the city.

David Harrell, in whose home Will Porter spent his first year in Austin, was a close friend of Colonel House's. He represented the United States in Barcelona, Spain, during the World War. His son, David Harrell, Jr., just a lad at the time, is said to have intercepted with his amateur radio, messages from Spain to Germany that prevented several sea disasters. Colonel Harrell and his family still live in Austin.

Another of the nationally known contemporaries of O. Henry in Austin is Thomas Watt Gregory, Attorney General in the Wilson administration, who is now practicing law in Houston, Texas. While at the University of Texas he enjoyed the reputation of being the "best orator of his day." He also married in Austin, Miss Julia Nalle.

Albert Sidney Burleson, Postmaster-General under Wilson, and his wife, living again in Austin, were contemporaries of the Porters. Mrs. Burleson is a writer.

David F. Houston, a member of the Wilson cabinet,

one time president of the University of Texas, and his wife, who was Miss Helen Beale, of Austin, now of New York City, were among the young people of Austin in Will Porter's and Athol Estes' day.

Charles A. Culbertson, the well known senator from Texas and one time governor, made of the Mansion a social center for the State and it is probable that the Porters were among those made welcome at his many informal dances.

Austin has had its goodly quota of men of ability who attained distinction, but none whose gifts have been so acclaimed or whose honors will be so enduring as those of William Sidney Porter, the O. Henry the literary world knows and loves.

Colophon

Here ends the story of Athol Estes and Will Porter, by Mrs. Frances Goggin Maltby, a classmate of Athol Estes—"The Dimity Sweetheart." The old-fashioned "dimity" cloth of the binding was especially selected in keeping with the theme, and the dimity initials designed for the story by August Dietz. It was made into a book by the Press of The Dietz Printing Co., Richmond, Virginia, in the year Nineteen Hundred and Thirty.

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